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Bucks sites proposed for federal cleanup

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From staff and wire reports

WASHINGTON — The site of a former chemical company in Nockamixon Township where toxic wastes were dumped in the 1960s is one of 38 hazardous waste sites in 18 states proposed as additions to the Superfund cleanup program by the federal Environmental Protection Agency.

With tax support for Superfund scheduled to expire Oct. 1 and cleanup activities already under a slowdown order, agency officials spoke optimistically about the prospects for renewal, saying pending bills in the House and Senate were "not that far apart from where we'd like to be."

The 38 proposed sites bring the number on the Superfund priority list to 850, of which 541 have been given final status on the list and 309 are still proposed.

Listing a site makes it eligible for federal cleanup, unless the government owns the site. The formal proposal, once published in the Federal Register, opens a 60-day period for public comment.

Plans to quarry the Revere site, a 111-acre tract off Route 611, have drawn bitter opposition from township residents since a Maryland based firm announced its intention to quarry rock from the land where etching wastes spilled from lagoons and killed aquatic life in a branch of Rapp Creek.

It is one of five sites in Pennsylvania and two in Bucks County proposed as additions to the list. The second Bucks site is in Croydon.

The EPA has estimated that the priority list eventually could hold 2,200 sites out of some 25,000 it knows about. Some other agencies have estimated that the total number of abandoned waste sites is far higher, with the congressional Office of Technology Assessment putting it at 100,000.

Three more military sites met listing criteria but were not formally proposed, a break from past practice to list federal sites even though they may not receive Superfund help. Officials said they expected eventually to put those three in a formal proposal.

Nine of the 38 locations are parts of waste disposal facilities currently regulated under the federal waste disposal law. Amendments to that law last year gave the EPA new enforcement powers and the agency said it was reconsidering its policy of putting such sites on the list.

Winston Porter, the EPA's assistant administrator for solid waste and emergency response, said at a news conference, "We're trying to keep the pipeline full ... even though we've had a slowdown."

Porter called passage of a new bill "almost physically impossible by Oct. 1." But he added, "If it's a matter of weeks, we won't be very badly hurt at all."

Porter said the 38 sites have lower scores on the EPA's hazard ranking system than sites designated earlier. And he said the agency believes it has brought the nation's worst sites into the program. While only six sites have been declared cleaned up, work is under way at 69 places and study and design are in progress at 379 more.

Pennsylvania sites include the following:

- Bendix Flight Systems Division, Bridgewater Township, Susquehanna County. EPA said on-site soils contain "significant levels" of several organic solvents which, according to tests conducted by a consultant, have contaminated residential wells. The company has supplied bottled water and installed filters on water lines to affected residents, EPA said.

- C&D Recycling, Foster Township, Luzerne County. For years, EPA said, the company incinerated telephone cables to melt off the lead and reclaim the remaining copper wire. Ground water sampling has confirmed the existence of lead and copper on the site, the agency said.

- Croydon TCE, Croydon, Bucks County. The site is an industrialized area in which trichloroethylene (TCE) and other volatile organic compounds have been detected in ground water and surface water. EPA said no source of contamination has yet been confirmed.

- Rte. 940 Drum Dump, Pocono Summit, Monroe County. During the 1970s, as many as 600 drums of "unknown materials" were stored at the dump, EPA said. In 1983, the state Department of Environmental Resources detected organic chemicals, including benzene, in on-site soil. About 100 drums have been excavated under DER supervision, EPA said.

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